

How to Love with Old Scars

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How to Love with Old Scars

by [lockergirl](#)

Summary

“Whatever. It doesn’t fucking matter,” Sapnap said, putting his knife away and readying his sword, “There’s nowhere left to run. You’re under arrest, Quackity.”

The satisfaction in Sapnap’s eyes was adorable. Too bad the man was about to be disappointed.

“No I’m not,” Quackity grinned, “because I call sanctuary!”

Sapnap blinked. “What?”

Quackity turned to the statue in the middle of the room, playing up the dramatics. “Oh great and powerful Karl!” He warbled, throwing his hands up in prayer, “I am but a humble sinner! Grant me sanctuary in your temple so that I may repent and learn the error of my ways!”

Or: To avoid getting arrested, Quackity seeks sanctuary in the time god's temple. He just wasn't expecting Sapnap, the guard pursuing him, to do the same.

Notes

THIS IS A SPIN-OFF FIC!

Quackity was introduced earlier in the *Blood Brothers* series, and this fic is the second half of his character arc. While I can't make you do anything, I'd **STRONGLY** recommend that you read the other fics in this series first so you can get the full context.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Most people didn't realize just how massive the capital of the Essempi Empire was. The majority of the city's inhabitants went months at a time without ever leaving their neighborhoods, and those who traveled its full length never made the journey on foot. Few knew exactly how many buildings there were within the city limits, and even fewer recognized the sheer number of dead ends, cul-de-sacs, and alleyways that existed under the capital's domain. The city had an almost claustrophobic feel to it, apartments and shops pressed up against each other like books in a library, all with their own stories and histories. Simply trying to count each address would have been enough to drive a man mad, so most residents decided that they were better off not knowing, ignoring the true scope of what surrounded them.

But Quackity knew. He understood the city's dimensions intimately. After all, he had been sprinting across them for the past hour.

Unfortunately, these impromptu marathons were becoming a habit. Multiple times a week, Quackity would find himself dashing across the city with a few guards at his heels, doing his best to ignore the shouts and orders that followed him. It was getting a bit old. Quackity hadn't even been doing anything *that* illegal today! "Gold watch" had a lot of meanings! In this case, "gold colored." He had never intended for his customers to assume that the items were real!

"Come back here!" one of the city guards shouted, a bit too close for comfort. Originally, there had been three men on Quackity's tail, but two of them had cut their losses after about 10 minutes of running. This last one, however, wasn't letting up no matter how many clever twists and turns his target took.

Today's chase was lasting longer than usual, resulting in several overturned fruit stands and more than a couple shoved civilians. There had been a few lulls, sure, moments where the fugitive could dive behind something and catch his breath, but those never lasted for more than a minute or two. Quackity had almost been hit by a carriage *seven* separate times, not even allowed the time or decency to flip somebody off before he was forced to keep running.

"Shit," Quackity hissed under his breath, ignoring the way his calves and lungs burned, "Fuck, fuck, *fuck!*"

And then, an opportunity. To his right was an alleyway, yet another in the city's infinite collection, but this one was different. This one had a fire escape whose ladder had been left at street level.

Turning sharply enough to twist a lesser man's ankles, Quackity shot into the alleyway, up the fire escape before he could fully process what he was doing. Then, he yanked the ladder up behind him.

The guard, always just a few steps behind, leapt to catch it, fingers grazing the lowest rung before he fell back to the ground, skidding across the pavement.

Quackity gave himself exactly ten seconds to catch his breath, watching as the man below got back to his feet.

The guard in question was about Quackity's height, sporting a five o'clock shadow and the world's tiniest ponytail. He was also, as always, wearing that stupid white scarf around his forehead, making it look like he had hit his head and didn't know how to properly apply the bandage. The accessory was as pointless as it was endearing, but it at least added a bit of personality to the man's otherwise boring guard uniform.

Quackity couldn't help but smile.

"Sorry, Sapnap!" he laughed, saluting the guard as he stepped back from the roof's edge, "You gotta be faster than that!"

Quackity wasn't traditionally a runner. When possible, he preferred subtler means, perhaps a few well-placed words or a spare ace up his sleeve, but desperate times called for desperate measures. For better or for worse, the last few months had made Quackity an expert at leaping across rooftops.

Knowing Sapnap (and Quackity *definitely* knew Sapnap), it would take the guard at least 30 seconds to scale the alleyway and start following him. That was plenty of time for Quackity to disappear, zig-zagging through the capital like a bat out of hell.

The solution was temporary. It would only take another few days for Sapnap to find him again. That guard was nothing if not persistent.

Quackity did his best to not look forward to it.

Running across rooftops was an art. Any small mistake, as simple as a single misplaced foot, could send a person tumbling several stories onto the pavement. Quackity knew a lot about calculated risks. He had lived his life measuring the odds, finding the easiest way out. Or trying to, at least.

Point being, after leaving his last position in the Blood God's cult, Quackity had slipped into the city's criminal underbelly with remarkable ease. After a few demeaning months as an errand boy, his boss started offering him real gigs. It was only a matter of time before Quackity truly established himself, and then he wouldn't have to worry about lousy guards like Sapnap anymore.

Confident that he had put enough distance between himself and his pursuer, Quackity slid down another fire escape, slipping onto the street. Then, for good measure, he ducked into a temple.

Though Quackity had come to know the capital intimately, the same could not be said for the city's temples. Over the past few months, he had made an active effort not to step into any of them, ignoring the voices that poured from their windows and the believers that surged from

their doorways. Quackity couldn't afford to let himself linger, instead forcing himself to move past the familiarity and the memories and the reminder that *you had something, once, you had a place and then you let it slip away*—

This temple was beautiful, clean and crisp with flawless white columns and high ceilings. The stained-glass windows acted almost like a kaleidoscope, draping the room with countless shades of purple and teal. Though all the tiles on the ground were white, the sunlight streaming through the glass made them appear like a mosaic, colors rippling out from the center until they brushed the tips of Quackity's shoes.

The temple had no pews, no confessionals, no fountains or frescos or rugs. Aside from a few benches that lined the walls by the front doors, there was only the altar, as pure and white as the rest of the building, and the usual statue of the temple's god.

Quackity knew plenty about Karl. He knew that the deity represented both time and memory, a double domain that gave him great power and respect. He knew that the god showed up frequently in all sorts of sacred texts, a constant observer and rare participant in humanity's antics. He knew that Karl was a popular god, swamped with prayers and devoted followers. He was known to be friendly, so people felt little shame in asking for favors. Praying to Karl was especially popular for little things like late mornings and misplaced items, situations where one needed just a bit more time or a slightly sharper memory.

That wasn't to say that no one came to Karl with more serious matters, though. The elderly prayed to save their decaying minds. The dying begged to extend their approaching deadlines. Everyone needed more time, more recollection, more *something*, and they already turned to Karl for so much. Why not ask for a little bit more?

If Quackity had ever prayed to the deity, it was too long ago to remember. Maybe once or twice he had asked for help remembering where he had left his house keys, back in the days where he still had a home to return to, before the draft.

The statue of the god was gorgeous, towering above the room yet still welcoming, demeanor bright and cheerful as it read from a spiral-embossed book. However, the specifics of the depiction were a bit vague, not quite committing to any details. That was the standard for such statues. It wasn't like the artist would have ever met the god, so any features were based on eyewitness testimony and pure conjecture.

Quackity was taking a careful step forward, entranced by the undeniable beauty of the room, when something slammed him against the wall, cheek and chest pressed up against the cool, marble blocks.

"Gotcha," Sappap said, hand tightening around Quackity's wrist. The guard had pinned him, leaving little chance to escape. To make matters worse, something sharp pressed into the small of Quackity's back, forcing him further against the wall.

Quackity laughed nervously, unsuccessfully trying to twist his wrist free. "Come on, Sappap, a knife? Really? Or are you just happy to see me?"

Sapnap groaned. “Can you be professional for five minutes? I’m arresting you. And you could at least be original with your shitty pick-up lines.”

“Well, it’s a bit hard to think of new material with a knife against my back!” Quackity teased, trying to keep the panic out of his voice, “Why don’t you just let me go? You can chase me around a little longer. It’ll be fun!”

Craning his neck, Quackity was just barely able to make out Sapnap’s face. Despite everything, the man was smiling.

“You’re fucking ridiculous,” he said, shaking his head, “I don’t understand why—”

“What are you doing?” a voice asked, echoing through the temple.

Sapnap’s grip loosened slightly in surprise. That was all Quackity needed to slip free, grazing past the knife and scurrying to the other side of the room.

It wasn’t a perfect escape. The corner he picked out of necessity had no exits, save for a few windows 20 feet up. Quackity was good, but even he couldn’t work miracles. Damn this beautiful building and its glossy marble walls. This was why he stuck to run-down temples. More broken windows to jump out of when things went south.

“Are you okay?” the voice said, now directly behind Quackity.

The fugitive spun around instantly, eyes immediately locking on a curious priest. The stranger had a sweep of brown hair and green— no, blue— no *purple*, if that was even possible, eyes. His sweater had a spiral plastered on the front of it, a clear symbol of the temple’s god.

Perfect. Maybe Quackity did have a way out after all.

“No, actually, I am not okay,” Quackity said, straightening his posture and pointing at Sapnap, “That man chased me into your temple. He has a knife! He tried to stab me!”

Sapnap scoffed. “I wasn’t going to *stab* you—”

“How was I supposed to know that?” Quackity asked, playing up his disbelief. In all honesty, he had never expected Sapnap to actually hurt him. If anything, Quackity was pretty sure the guard had pulled his knife away when he broke loose a minute ago. “I was fearing for my life!”

“Well, that doesn’t sound very good,” the priest said, looking at Sapnap with a considerable amount of doubt.

The guard groaned. “Whatever. It doesn’t fucking matter,” he said, putting his knife away and readying his sword, “There’s nowhere left to run. You’re under arrest, Quackity.”

The satisfaction in Sapnap’s eyes was adorable. Too bad the man was about to be disappointed.

“No I’m not,” Quackity grinned, “because I call sanctuary!”

Sapnap blinked. “What?”

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“Are you being serious right now?” Sapnap asked, clearly unamused.

“As serious as the weight on my soul.” Quackity smiled, turning to the priest. “Hey, you’re going to grant me sanctuary, right?”

“What?” the priest asked, clearly not expecting to be addressed. “Oh! Uh, sure. Why not?”

“*Why not?*” Sapnap sputtered, “The reason ‘why not’ is because this crook is one of the worst conman in the district! He’s got a rap sheet that could stretch across the entire city!”

“But he called sanctuary,” the priest shrugged.

Quackity pumped his fist into the air, savoring the sound of Sapnap’s frustrated groan.

“Sorry, handsome,” Quackity grinned, turning back to the man who had been chasing him, “It seems like you’ve lost me once again.”

“Oh, go fuck yourself,” Sapnap snapped.

Quackity gasped in fake horror. “Cursing in a temple? Sapnap!” He turned to the priest with a smile, “He’s always a sore loser.”

“No,” Sapnap interrupted, “I am *not* a sore loser because I haven’t *lost*. I also call sanctuary!”

For a moment, no one said anything.

“Wait,” Quackity said, taking a nervous step back, “You can’t do that!”

“Why not?” Sapnap asked, “If you get to do it, so do I!”

“No. No, that’s not how this fucking works!”

Sapnap looked at the priest. “I’m staying here too.”

Said priest simply shrugged. “Okay, I guess.”

“No, no no no no *no*,” Quackity said, walking over to the priest with his head in his hands, “This is bullshit! He doesn’t even want to repent, he just wants to arrest me! You have to kick him out!”

“Well, I’m letting *you* stay here,” the priest rationalized, “so it’d be unfair if I played favorites. I don’t think that’s how temples are supposed to do things.”

Sapnap grinned. “That’s exactly what I was saying! Thank you, uh—”

The priest smiled back. “Karl.”

Sapnap spurted out a laugh, pointing over his shoulder to the statue. “What, like that guy?”

“Oh,” Karl said, as though he was just noticing the coincidence, “Uh, yeah. My parents were big believers.”

“That’s gotta get confusing.”

Karl shrugged. “Not really, I guess.”

But Quackity wasn’t listening anymore. He was too busy panicking. If Sapnap was here, that meant that Quackity was trapped again, stuck inside four temple walls. The familiarity of the situation was sickening, eating away at his stomach and ripping his nerves to shreds. How was he supposed to slip away from Sapnap now, if the guard's eyes were always on him? How was he supposed to avoid a noose around his neck?

When Quackity turned to look at Sapnap, there was already a smug look on the guard’s face. For the first time in weeks, Quackity didn’t find it endearing.

“‘Sorry, handsome,’ ” Sapnap said, teasing out his words, “I guess you’re stuck with me.”

Chapter End Notes

Wilbur at the end of "How to Pray with Shaking Hands": "I hope Quackity is okay..."

Quackity: **currently in the "hurt" half of his "hurt/comfort" arc**

It's finally spin-off time! My boy Quackity deserves a complete character arc, and I'm giving it to him!

This fic has a lot of firsts for me! Most crucially, I've never written a fic that qualifies as a "romance" before. This is obviously based on the DSMP characters and their lore, NOT their creators. That being said, if I cross any creator boundaries (which I don't plan to do... this story will be quite chaste), PLEASE let me know!

In case you missed the note at the beginning, this is a SPIN-OFF FIC. Quackity was introduced earlier in the *Blood Brothers* series, and this fic is the second half of his character arc. While I can't make you do anything, I'd strongly recommend that you read the other fics in this series first so you can get the full context (if you haven't already).

Feel free to talk with me on [Twitter](#) or [Tumblr](#)! Alternatively, if you leave a comment, I will cherish it like my own child.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

This is your reminder that this fic is a **SEQUEL SPINOFF**. This chapter will reference past books, so if you don't understand bits, I warned you.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The rest of the day passed strangely and slowly. Unlike the Blood God's temple, where there was always something keeping Quackity's hands busy, the Temple of Time and Memory was pretty boring. Apparently, taking refuge here meant a lot of sitting and staring as people silently filtered in and out of the building. It was absolutely mind-numbing.

The boredom was made worse by Quackity's constant level of panic. With every passing moment, he became more convinced that this was all some elaborate joke. What was stopping Sapnap from arresting him? The guard's sword was still on his hip. A priest's word would do less than nothing if he decided to finally put that weapon to use.

This had to be a fucked-up prank. Maybe the guards were sick of chasing Quackity around and wanted to mess with him a bit, offering him a false sense of security before throwing a noose around his neck.

Quackity couldn't stop picking at his nails, biting his lip, tapping his foot, *anything* to get a bit of his anxious energy out. This was torture, but he couldn't show weakness. If the situation really was a mind game, he couldn't afford to lose it.

Luckily, Sapnap was too busy flirting with the priest to realize that Quackity was on the verge of a complete nervous breakdown.

Karl and Sapnap were getting along like a house on fire, swapping banter as naturally as breathing. Every few minutes, one of them would burst into laughter, throwing their head back as the other smiled in delight.

As the hours passed, the pair kept chatting, only interrupted whenever a curious templegoer came up to ask a question. Karl always seemed taken aback when he was approached, as though he hadn't expected anyone to actually talk to him. It was a weird reaction considering that, at least as far as Quackity could tell, he was the temple's only priest.

Under better circumstances, Quackity would have loved to join in, especially if it meant poking fun at Sapnap. He always loved riling the guard up, getting equal pleasure from the man's smiles and curses. It was even better when he got both at once.

But apparently, Sapnap had more interesting things to focus on right now, lounging on the pillowed ground next to Karl. Quackity did his best to squash down the sour feeling in his

chest as he listened in on the conversation.

“So what does your god look like?” Sapanap asked, nodding towards the statue in the middle of the room, “Whoever made that thing left out some key details.”

Karl smirked, as though he had just remembered a particularly funny joke. “Well,” he said, exaggerating his thoughtfulness, “They say he’s *very* handsome.”

“I believe it,” Sapanap grinned, “If he’s half as handsome as his priests, he’s got to be the best looking god in the pantheon.”

Karl’s eyes went wide at that. The priest sputtered out a laugh as his cheeks grew pink, playfully punching Sapanap’s shoulder.

“You’re ridiculous,” he said, punching Sapanap again, a bit harder this time. The guard pretended to be offended, rubbing the ‘injury’ with a hurt look on his face, though neither man seemed particularly upset. “Absolutely ridiculous.”

Quackity was going to strangle someone. It had been less than one day, and he was already going fucking insane.

“Hey Quackity!” Sapanap shouted, craning his head back to get a better glimpse of his target. There was a roguish smile on his lips. Quackity wanted to wipe it off. “Why don’t you come over here? I was just telling Karl—”

“I’m good,” Quackity interrupted, standing suddenly as he turned away from the pair. It was bad enough to be held captive as they flirted in front of him. He didn’t want to imagine whatever else Sapanap could make him suffer through.

Besides a bathroom and the front entrance, there was only one door in the temple, tucked away in the far back corner. Without worrying about what was on the other side, Quackity swung it open, eager to get a moment of privacy.

The room in question was a kitchen, small but well-designed. Past it was another room, door just ajar enough to reveal a bedroom.

Ah. So this was where Karl lived.

Quackity threw himself into one of the kitchen chairs, trying to ease his nerves. At this rate, heart failure and high blood pressure were going to kill before the judicial system even got the chance, and then everything he did to stay alive would be for *nothing*—

“You okay?”

Karl was standing in the doorway, looking at his guest with genuine concern. Quackity immediately tensed, straightening in his chair.

“I’m fine,” he insisted, quickly averting his eyes, “Did Sapanap tell you to—”

“Oh, Sapnap didn’t tell me anything,” Karl said, waving his hand dismissively as he walked into the kitchen, “I came in here because it’s almost dinner. I wanted to see if there was any food in the cupboards.”

Quackity understood why Sapnap would flirt with someone like Karl. The man was tall and handsome, with bright smiles and even brighter laughter. He was the type of guy you’d get flustered talking to, though that didn’t seem to be a problem for Sapnap.

It certainly made more sense than flirting with someone like Quackity.

Sometimes, Quackity would notice that Sapnap acted differently from the other guards. Like he was more invested in the chase. And maybe a year ago, Quackity's suspicions would have made sense. He had been handsome enough then, but now? With missing teeth and a scar running down his face? He was living on the streets and looked the part. Probably smelled it too, despite best efforts. Not the kind of guy you’d bother wasting time on, unless you could turn him in for a reward.

“Huh,” Karl said, “Nothing in here except some wet cat food. That’s not going to work for either of you, is it?”

Quackity scrunched up his face. “I’ll pass, thanks. I’d rather starve than eat that shit again.”

Karl raised an eyebrow, clearly amused. “*Again?*”

It was Quackity’s turn to wave him off. “Hey, desperate times call for desperate measures, you know? Can’t go turning up your nose at a meal when you’ve got nothing else to eat, no matter how fucking bad the shit smells.”

Karl’s amusement faded slightly, replaced by something more concerned.

“Well then,” the priest eventually said, pulling out the cat food and a bowl from the cupboards, “We’ll order in. What’s the point of having temple funds if you don’t spend them, right?”

Quackity laughed at that, startled. “Aren’t you supposed to save that shit for important stuff? Like, if the roof starts leaking, or you have to feed starving people?”

“*We* are starving, Quackity,” Karl said, a dramatic flourish added to his words, “And what could be more important than making sure my guests are comfortable? Can’t have people thinking that the ‘great and powerful Karl’ doesn’t look out for his new converts. We’d have a mutiny. And then no more money for takeout!”

Quackity laughed again, unable to stop himself. Karl grinned, looking exceptionally pleased.

The priest threw the kitchen window open, leaving the bowl of cat food out on the windowsill. Quackity noted that the exit didn’t look big enough for a person to comfortably crawl through, though he could probably make do if push came to shove.

“Sapnap said that you were a criminal,” Karl said, sitting down across from Quackity, “You must have done something pretty bad for him to chase you all the way here.”

Quackity snorted. “Not today,” he said, pulling open his coat. He hadn’t bothered to take it off, in case a good chance to escape had presented itself. Hanging from the jacket lining were about a dozen fake gold watches, all with different designs.

Karl’s eyes grew wide. “They’re so pretty!”

“They’re fake,” Quackity said, tossing one across the table, “Probably worth less than the cat food on the ledge. But if you play your cards right, they sell for a shitton more, I’ll tell you that much.”

Karl picked up the watch, running his fingers across its face. “Why would you get in trouble for selling these?”

And wasn't that a silly question? Quackity grinned. “What can I say?” he said, closing his coat again, “They hate to see me succeed.”

“It’s three minutes and 21 seconds off,” Karl muttered, staring at the clock face. Quickly, he adjusted the watch’s time.

Quackity blinked. “How did you know that?”

Karl looked up, visibly caught off guard. “Oh, you know,” he smiled, “Time priest stuff.” The moment the clock’s time was correct, Karl slipped it onto his wrist. “Check it out! Pretty snazzy, right?”

Quackity looked at the watch for a moment. It was strange, watching Karl hold out that piece of junk like it was something valuable. Something worth keeping.

“You can have it,” Quackity said, “It looks good on you.”

Karl’s face brightened. “You mean it?”

The conman nodded. “I’ve got tons,” he said, “Besides, it’s not like I’m going to be able to sell them anytime soon.”

At that moment, Sapnap burst into the room, a bag in his arms.

“Um,” he said, eyes darting between the two men in front of him, “One of the temple’s followers dropped off some food? I feel bad, I didn’t have anything to give them in return.”

Quackity looked at the bag, startled. What luck! It had hardly been a few minutes since they realized there was no food, and here was a freshly-cooked dinner, delivered straight to the temple door.

“Don’t worry about it!” Karl said, standing up to lead Sapnap to the table, “We can give them something next time we see them.”

Sapnap turned to look at Quackity. In turn, Quackity looked towards the floor.

Karl smiled. “Let’s eat!”

Sapnap spent most of dinner asking inane questions about the God of Time and Memory. He was, in every way possible, completely clueless about the deity. Apparently his hours of conversation with Karl hadn't included a single question about what the hell was going on.

It was hard to hold that against him, though. After all, Quackity had been just as confused when he joined the Blood's God temple. Maybe more so. He had been on a lot of painkillers at the time.

It was embarrassing to think about now, but at least that weakness hadn't lingered for long. The moment Quackity had realized *"Oh shit, this is really happening, I'm actually in a blood cult,"* he had immediately begun his research, scouring holy texts, history books, and tabloid sightings with equal enthusiasm.

Somebody had to do it. Wilbur had been, no pun intended, a bit too convinced of his own myth. Though Quackity hadn't realized it, that bastard hadn't even refreshed his memory before going up to preach the good god's word for the first time.

"The Blood God's not real, Quackity," Wilbur would whisper, voice low enough to keep the other cultists from hearing, *"It doesn't matter what I say, as long as everybody likes it."*

That had been a load of horseshit, but Wilbur was nothing if not stubborn. So Quackity had picked up the slack for him.

The Blood God was an enigma, and that meant a lot of research. It also meant, consequently, that Quackity read a lot about the other gods.

The God of Time and Memory, Karl, seemed neutral enough. He was rarely actively malicious towards mankind, though benevolent might have been overstating it. Instead, the deity was usually just... there. A minor character in every major story, watching from the wings. His name was in every history book, but it never stood out. It was just another word amongst thousands of others.

The god did intervene occasionally. Once, according to legend, he helped a group of pirates find a trove of lost treasure. Another time, he laid an entire town to waste, erasing all recollection of the inhabitants from mankind's collective memory. Typical god stuff.

But mostly, he did nothing. It was strange. The Blood God also did nothing, sure, but that was because he had *distanced* himself from humanity (or, if Wilbur was to be believed, because he didn't exist). The God of Time and Memory (and XD above, wasn't that a mouthful) seemed to be much more active about his inactivity.

In the end, Wilbur had thanked Quackity for all of his research, occasionally borrowing specific anecdotes for his sermons, but honestly, the prophet had seemed bored by it. Wilbur

had been much more interested in greeting the new converts, in restoring the temple, in shaking hands and teasing Tommy and *lighting the entire building up with TNT*—

Quackity slammed his glass down a bit harder than necessary, pushing the memories from his head. Then, he took another bite of his meal, vaguely listening to more of Sapnap's questions.

The three men had a lot of company during dinner. At least five separate alleycats hopped up on the windowsill, eagerly scarfing down the cat food. Quackity argued that it was six, since cats two and five had different markings on their paws, but the jury was still out on that one.

"You take in a lot of strays?" Quackity asked, breaking his bread into tinier and tinier pieces. He'd get around to eating it eventually.

"Huh?" Karl asked, fork halfway to his mouth, "What do you mean?"

Quackity motioned to himself and Sapnap, then to the cats. "Just seems like you have a habit of it. You know, taking mangey animals off the street and feeding them..."

Sapnap made an offended noise, but his mouth was too full for a rebuttal.

Karl laughed good-naturedly. "No, no I— I'll be honest, it's actually been a while since I've... had any guests."

"Whad-cha mean?" Sapnap said, mouth still half-full. Quackity did his best not to grimace.

"I mean," Karl clarified, staring off into the middle-distance. There was something strange and forlorn about his gaze. "Plenty of people come into these temples. And I *see* all of them, sure. But they kind of... pass me by, usually. I'm more of an observer. I help out when needed, but most people just don't pay attention to me."

"That can't be true," Sapnap said, having finally swallowed his bite, "You mean they just ignore you?"

Quackity agreed with Sapnap. Karl was vibrant. How could anyone walk past him without turning to look again? Back in the Blood God's temple, the congregation had always had been thrilled to chat with Quackity. A young couple showing off their newborn baby. A teenager asking for religious advice. An old lady complimenting his outfit.

And, of course, there had been the other cultists.

Quackity had felt a lot of things in that temple, but he had never felt alone.

Karl just smiled. "It's not my job to interfere in their lives. I'm only supposed to step in when someone asks for my help."

"Sounds lonely," Quackity said, something familiar clenching in his chest, "Working all the time, with no recognition."

"Not always," Karl corrected, taking a sip of his water, "Sometimes I get to meet people like you."

Quackity wasn't quite sure how to feel about those words, but as he glanced across the table, Sapnap was smiling.

By 9 p.m., both Quackity and Sapnap were struggling to keep their eyes open. As it turned out, spending an entire afternoon sprinting across the city drained a lot of energy.

Karl didn't seem upset by their requests to turn in early. In fact, he seemed thrilled that they were actually planning to spend the night at all.

"I've only got one bedroom," he explained, leading them towards the back, "but I think if we squeeze it'll be alright."

The room was pleasant enough, though sparsely decorated, as though the priest didn't spend much time in it. It had purple walls, freshly painted, as well as a wardrobe and a desk in the corner. But Quackity wasn't concerned about the lack of wall art or how strangely cold the tiled floor was.

He was focused on the bed. Specifically, how there was only one.

"You guys probably don't want to squish, so I think only two people can fit," Karl said, cheerfully fluffing up a pillow, "I don't have anything else to sleep on. Sorry. I wasn't expecting any guests today..."

This was a literal nightmare. Wasn't it bad enough that Quackity was trapped? Did he really have to sleep next to the man who was trying to have him executed?

"I'd rather not sleep on the floor..." Sapnap mused, looking thoughtfully towards the bed.

Quackity scowled. If this motherfucker thought he could trap him *and* make it impossible for him to sleep, he had another thing coming. "What makes you think *I* want to?" he growled, frustration in every syllable, "I'm not sleeping on the floor either!"

"Okay! I'll do it!" Karl announced, pulling a blanket off the mattress and throwing it onto the ground. "You two can share the bed."

This was not the outcome Quackity wanted. "Wait—"

For once, Sapnap seemed to be on the same page. "Karl, this is *your* bed. We can't just kick you out of it—"

Karl waved both of them off, already throwing a pillow onto his blanket. "You guys are my guests! Plus, we can rotate tomorrow night. Or get a second bed. I don't know. I haven't really thought it out."

Quackity glanced at Sapnap. While the man didn't look thrilled, he also wasn't protesting anymore.

The guard rubbed the back of his neck. "What do you think?" he asked, looking over at his fellow guest.

Quackity scowled. "I'm not sleeping on the fucking floor just because you want the bed to yourself."

Sapnap immediately bristled. "Well, neither am I!"

"Fine," Quackity said, crossing his arms.

Sapnap nodded back. "Fine!"

"Then we're all on the same page!" Karl said cheerfully, opening the wardrobe and pulling out some spare pajamas, "We'll trade off every night!"

Quackity took the clothes reluctantly, immediately startled by their material. They were made from the softest fabric he had ever held, as though they had been woven for the gods themselves.

"Blue for you," Karl said, smiling wide, "to match your hat! It's a nice color. Compliments your eyes."

Quackity's scowl washed off his face like dirt under running water.

As Karl went to hand Sapnap a pair of red pajamas, Quackity took another look at the bed. Honestly, it was pretty big. If he pushed himself up against the edge, it'd almost be like he was sleeping alone.

Taking a deep breath, Quackity steadied himself for the night ahead.

Chapter End Notes

Sapnap: "Woah... There's only... one bed 🙌🙌..."

Quackity (completely misinterpreting the conversation): "Fuck off."

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Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Quackity watched from several rooftops away as the temple burned to the ground. The stained glass windows, whose panes he had carefully replaced himself, had shattered onto the dirt. The stone walls, which had been painstakingly cleaned by Quackity's own hands, were crumbling. The force of the explosion had been too much for them to bear. People at street level were screaming, howling names and prayers and desperate wails, all helpless to stop the inferno. To stop what Quackity had let happen—

—But no, that wasn't right. Quackity hadn't even been in the same neighborhood when the temple exploded. He hadn't been dumb enough to stick around after leaving—

—“Wilbur!” Quackity screamed, hacking up smoke. He was standing in the middle of the temple, head swiveling as he desperately stumbled forward. A piece of the ceiling collapsed to his right, almost crushing the cultist under its weight, but he pressed on. “Tommy! Eret! Techno, Phil, please! Please! Someone fucking answer me!”

The temple was more ruin than building at this point, flames licking up every inch of wallspace. The vines seemed to twist inside the blazing fire, and everything was red, red, red, as though the temple itself was bleeding—

—No, no, that didn't make sense either. Quackity hadn't wouldn't have survived in that building. No one had—

—“Q,” Tommy gasped, reaching weakly for the older cultist.

“Shit,” Quackity hissed, pressing down on the teen's wounds. The gashes were everywhere, bleeding like faucets, and no matter what Quackity did, he couldn't get it to stop—

—No, no, no—

—“You let him die, Quackity,” Wilbur whispered, placing a kind hand on his friend's shoulder. Blood covered Wilbur's fingers, and it was seeping into Quackity's shirt, into his skin and bones and marrow, staining everything red. “You could have saved him. You could have saved all of us. But you ran instead. You're a coward—”

—No! Quackity hadn't meant for any of it to happen! He had just been scared. He hadn't been thinking straight. None of them had been *thinking*—

—“You wanted to be free,” Wilbur scolded, yanking Quackity away from the kid. Tommy whined at the loss, limp arms falling helplessly to the ground, but Wilbur's grip was too tight for Quackity to escape. “You let this happen. You're the reason we're all dead. All of this is your fault.”

“No,” Quackity whispered, finally finding his voice again. He wanted to rip himself free from Wilbur, wanted to push the man away, but the thought of losing him again, even if it was by only a few inches, hurt too much to consider. “No, I— I didn’t want this! I didn’t know that this would happen!”

The temple’s back wall collapsed completely, crushing the altar under its weight.

Wilbur shook his head. As he smiled, blood spilled out from between his teeth.

“Don’t lie to yourself, Big Q,” Wilbur whispered, words somehow echoing despite the chaos, “You knew exactly what I was going to do.”

Quackity woke already screaming, jolting up as though he was being murdered. Tears were streaming down his face, and he was trying to gasp and sob at the same time, but there wasn’t enough air, not enough *air*—

“Quackity!” someone shouted. It wasn’t clear who. It was difficult enough for the cultist to just stay upright, to keep from dying on the spot—

Soft hands grabbed his face. At once, Quackity was staring into Karl’s eyes.

“Quackity,” Karl said, voice calm, “It’s okay.”

It was as though every thought in his head had evaporated at once, torn from its place and left to flutter to the floor. Immediately, Quackity’s breathing steadied, that strange emptiness replaced by a sudden calm.

It was then that the embarrassment kicked in.

Quackity’s entire body recoiled from Karl’s touch, horrified to be caught in such a compromising moment. The priest’s hands immediately fell to his sides, though Karl’s eyes stayed locked on Quackity, clearly concerned.

“I’m sorry,” Karl said, looking a bit guilty, “I won’t do that again, but I— I had to do *something*. You were panicking.”

“You—” Quackity swallowed, trying to get his thoughts back in order, “I—”

“Are you okay?” Sappnap asked, peering up over the edge of the bed. With a jolt, Quackity realized that the man had fallen off the mattress. Sappnap was still tangled up in their shared sheets, obviously disoriented by the fact that he was on the floor, but the only worry in the guard’s expression.

“Did I push you off?” Quackity asked, watching in horror as the man climbed back into bed.

“Not really,” Sapnap answered, getting under the blankets but not settling in, “Startled the hell out of me though. What *was* that?”

“I— nothing,” Quackity said, screwing his eyes shut. Snippets of his nightmare still danced around the corners of his vision, haunting every hard edge and dark shadow, but the specifics were already fading. “Ignore me. Just go back to sleep.”

At once, the eyes on Quackity felt a thousand times heavier. He couldn’t do this. He couldn’t be trapped in this room, sandwiched between two people he barely knew.

Without warning, Quackity pushed himself to the foot of the bed, stumbling away from the mess he had caused.

“Wait—” Sapnap said, but his words were cut short by Quackity slamming the bedroom door, already in the sanctuary of the kitchen.

For several minutes, Quackity just stood there, bracing himself against the kitchen table, begging his lungs to start working again. No matter what breathing techniques he tried or mindfulness exercises he attempted, nothing helped. Every time he opened his eyes, all Quackity could see was darkness closing in around him, blocking out his sight, making him panic again. Sheer adrenaline kept him on his feet, though he didn’t know how much longer that would last.

Quackity deserved this, didn’t he? For not saving them.

With that thought, the conman finally collapsed, unable to stop himself from sobbing again.

Quackity hadn’t been there when the temple exploded. After Wilbur's suicidal ramblings, the conman had put about a mile of distance between him and his old prison before ducking into a pawn shop.

For months, Bad had been dumping off bags of gold for Wilbur to use as sacrifices. Pocketing the occasional piece had been insultingly easy.

It wasn’t a ton of money, but it was enough to last Quackity a few good weeks. That was all he really needed. Enough for a new start.

One night, Quackity promised himself. He’d spend one more night in the capital, and then by morning, he’d be gone.

The explosion occurred around dinnertime.

Even from a distance, it had been terrible to hear. Several of the tavern's patrons had knocked their drinks over, and a few decorative plates fell from walls.

Quackity felt the loss before he even saw the flames.

He remembered watching, frozen amongst the crowd, as Wilbur's limp and broken body was pulled from the rubble, burnt half past recognition and missing both arms. Quackity had forced himself to play witness as a plain, white sheet was laid over his friend's body, hiding him like a ghost.

Then, he kept watching as Bad, also torn into pieces by the explosion, was collected. Countless charred, broken corpses were laid beside the head priest. Quackity recognized a few of them: the old woman who always called him handsome, the merchant who'd donate extra to the collection box, the guard who stood outside on Tuesdays. All dead and gone, like Wilbur.

There was no clear evidence of Tommy. It had given Quackity a furious hope. Maybe the boy and his family had escaped the explosion. Maybe they hadn't been in the temple at all.

But as more bodies were pulled from the rubble, the former cultist became less convinced.

At some point, a guard had pushed Quackity away, telling the crowd to make room. It was too dangerous to stand so close to what had once been the temple. The few remaining walls were unstable, threatening to collapse at any moment. Whatever bodies remained in the ruins would have to be collected another day.

It didn't really matter either way. No one in the explosion had survived. That much was clear.

It was at that moment the realization hit.

One way or another, the deal that Wilbur had struck with Bad was over.

Quackity was supposed to be in that wreckage. If the high priest's men didn't find his body, they might start looking for him. They might send him back to the front lines. Then all of this would have been for nothing.

Quackity had started running before he was able to fully process the thought.

If he was a smarter man, Quackity would have left the city. He would have picked some new name and identity, eager to leave this chapter of his life well behind him.

But he couldn't. Not when bodies were still being pulled from the temple's remains. Not when Tommy hadn't been found.

Quackity did his best to disguise himself. He couldn't afford a new wardrobe, so he settled for a new coat. He couldn't bring himself to cut his hair, so he bought a blue beanie and pulled it as far down as it would go. And, of course, there was nothing to be done about the scar on his face, a wretched reminder of everything he had risked and lost, so he just kept living with it.

All things considered, it was no surprise that the city guard caught on to him so soon.

Weeks passed. More scraps of bodies were found in the temple, unidentifiable. There was still no clear sign of Tommy.

Eventually, Quackity came to the obvious conclusion. He used his last of his coins to get as drunk as he could manage, saving nothing but headaches for the next morning.

Two weeks later, he was in Karl's temple.

Chapter End Notes

See, the problem with c!Quackity is that I think we can make him even MORE traumatized.

This chapter is shorter than usual, but if I didn't publish it now, I knew I never would.

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